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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**

**Madison area Soldier chosen as new commander of 211th  
Engineer Company, first Sapper Tab to be awarded**

*By Roger C. Anderson  
Information Officer*

RAPID CITY, S.D. – Captain Heath Abraham will take the helm of the 211th Engineer Company (Sapper) during a change-of-command ceremony to be held at 11 a.m. (CDT) on Sunday, Aug. 3, at the Madison National Guard Armory.

Immediately following the change of command, there will be a ceremonial pinning for 2nd Lt. Chris Long who will be awarded the Sapper Tab, the first to be worn in the unit and the South Dakota National Guard.

The 211th was formed in Madison and De Smet last year when the Army National Guard began its transformation. It replaced B Company, 153rd Engineer Battalion. It is the only South Dakota Army National Guard engineer company that is termed a “Sapper” unit. Its mission is to execute mobility, counter-mobility and survivability tasks and provide general engineering support to a maneuver unit or a support brigade.

A sapper may perform any of a variety of tasks under combat conditions. Such tasks typically include laying or clearing minefields, demolitions, field defenses, as well as building bridges, road and airfield construction and repair. In other words, the sapper's tasks now involve facilitating movement of allied forces and impeding movement of the enemy.

Capt. Abraham grew up in Ramona and now works for the Madison Police Department. He enlisted in the Madison unit in December of 1997 during his junior year in high school and became a commissioned officer in 2003.

“My biggest strength is that I served in this unit as an enlisted soldier and as a platoon leader,” said Abraham. “My biggest challenge as commander will be preparing a very young unit for possible deployment.”

The 211th received a training alert in May for possible deployment to Afghanistan.

“It’s only a possibility right now, but we will start planning and training in order to be ready if called to duty,” he said.

Abraham, 28, served as a platoon leader in Iraq with A Company, 153rd, in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom.

Abraham replaces Capt. Trent Bruce, a civil engineer who lives in Rock Rapids, Iowa. Bruce led the unit for the past four years and took command of what was then B Company, 153rd, in November of 2004 while the unit was deployed in Iraq.

“We were already planning the redeployment phase and it was my job to get everyone home safely,” said Bruce, who moves on to become the assistant operations officer for the 153rd Engineer Battalion in Huron.

After returning, Bruce’s first challenge was to help unit members make a smooth transition into civilian life.

“It was difficult for many of the Soldiers,” said the 31-year-old commander. “Some continue to struggle even today, three years later.”

Since returning from the war, the Madison unit has worked hard to maintain strength, went through a unit changeover, and stepped up training after the recent notification of possible deployment.

“The greatest challenge for me and my troops is balancing the duties of being a Guard member with those of family affairs and civilian employment,” said Bruce.

## SAPPER TAB CEREMONY

Immediately following the change of command, a short ceremony will honor 2nd Lt. Chris Long, a platoon leader in the 211th who recently received the Sapper Tab after successfully completing the Sapper Leaders Course.

“The course exposes leaders to a higher level of stress and expectations,” said Long, who is a training officer at the 196th Regiment (Regional Training Institute) in Sturgis.

In July of 2004, a new Sapper Tab was approved for award and wear by Soldiers who complete the 28-day course at Fort Leonard Wood, Mo. The tab is worn on the left shoulder above the unit patch.

The Sapper Leaders Course is designed to train joint-service leaders in small unit tactics, leadership skills, and warfighter tactics required to perform as part of a combined arms

team in a contemporary operating environment. The SLC is open to enlisted Soldiers in the grades of specialist (promotable) and above, and engineer officers, captain and below.

“I believe I will just be the first of many to complete this course,” Long said. “I hope the lessons learned throughout the course will help me be a better leader when it counts.”

Long served in Iraq with 2nd Battalion, 147th Field Artillery from 2004-2005.

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**FOR MORE INFORMATION**, please contact Capt. Jason Thomson at (605) 352-0203 or Sgt. 1st Class Mark Ferber at (605) 256-5287.

**NOTE:** Since the terrorist attacks on America, the South Dakota National Guard has mobilized more than 3,100 Soldiers and 1,000 Airmen in support of the Global War on Terror.

Currently, about 600 Soldiers and Airmen from the South Dakota National Guard remain on duty in Iraq, Afghanistan, and other locations throughout Southwest Asia. More than 3,600 National Guardsmen are available in South Dakota to provide support for state and national emergencies and homeland defense.